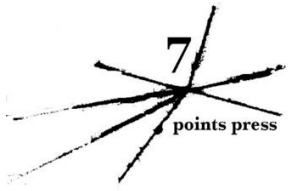
AD INFINITUM!

New and Selected Poems

1995—2025

Alan May



Praise for *Notes Toward an Apocryphal Text*

"[Alan May's] vivid imagination expresses itself in brilliant juxtapositions of imagery and language. His work has an immediate power and, beneath its often-absurdiste surface, is rich and haunting." **—Bill Knott**

"The poems…are carefully measured, stark and moving. It is a strong and original poetry." **—Simon Perchik**

"Alan May's poems are taut, intense, weird, and occasionally perverse…Rarely will you find poetry that is both absolutely spontaneous and inherently logical, but May manages that dichotomy with deft and surprising turns of phrase, and with a ferocious resistance to the realm of the safe, the expected, the blandly poetic. In short, this is a poet with an uncompromising individuality." **—Inman Majors**

Praise for *Dead Letters*

"*Dead Letters* is a work of great beauty and force, of intelligence and stark humility." **—Maurice Manning**

"Only here, in poems playful as they are crucial, whimsical & heartbreaking… can the instrument burn to be sung, its every breath a gorgeous annihilation." **—Ariana-Sophia Kartsonis**

"Melville's Ahab wanted to 'strike though' the pasteboard mask of reality, to whatever was underneath the dead letter of the world. See where that got him. Alan May knows another world, the world such letters make with and out of one another, a visionary, resonant, beautiful world where nothing lurks to lead us away. *Dead Letters* is a sensuous, lively book, an impressive debut." **—Jake Adam York**

"Part Seuss, part Stein, part Brothers (very) Grimm, *Dead Letters* arrives in a lively blaze of highly accomplished play marking Alan May's own arrival into the quirky exactitude of his peculiarly fine poetry." **—Hank Lazer**

Praise for *More Unknowns*

"To read Alan May's *More Unknowns* is to navigate an alluring necropolis in which the signature phrases of our own numbed and bellicose epoch continue signaling through the flames. May's canny and delicate lyrics remind us that to live in our era is to be proximate to both the technology of violence and its taxonomy; there is no one alive on earth who does not suffer this infernal fluency." **—Joyelle McSweeney**

Praise for *Derelict Days in That Derelict Town: New and Uncollected Poems*

"May's strong, often humorous, unique voice makes the ordinary and rural spaces—the plant life, cigarettes, and

rust of Appalachia—surreal and mythic…We feel, ultimately, 'as if/ anything were possible / there in the woods far from home.'" **—Sara Moore Wagner**

"The longer sequences of 'The Boy and the Monster' and 'Six Gothics' sustain some of the most ingenious imagery this side of Wallace Stevens and Russell Edson…Alan May's imagination is a wonderful place to visit, and I kind of wish I lived there." **—Jesse Graves**

"The quirky wrapping of these poems peels away to reveal that, against all odds, underneath the everyday horrors of the world, survives a tenderness, alive, capacious, nothing less than miraculous."
—Cintia Santana

"Alan May interrogates memory and imagination in this collection of arresting days, underscoring how the mundane and ordinary are anything but that, if we will only pay attention. But I'd be remiss if I suggested his poems are somber affairs, dour and dreary. His interrupted narratives are romps of dereliction, full of sly mischief and telling critiques." **—Todd Davis**

"In unforgettable poems where allegory and fairy tale blend into the wonder of the untamable, torch-hunted being, we are asked, 'where is the lovely child / running through the forest where is he / who is miraculously healed?'" **—Tyler Mills**

AD INFINITUM!

New and Selected Poems

1995—2025

Also by Alan May

Notes Toward an Apocryphal Text (2006)

Dead Letters (2008)

More Unknowns (2014)

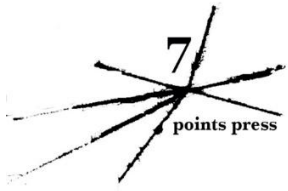
Derelict Days in That Derelict Town: New and Uncollected Poems (2025)

AD INFINITUM!

New and Selected Poems

1995—2025

Alan May



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The poems "Composition with Orange," "Happy and Sad," and "More Unknowns" are based on paintings by Tom Wegrzynowski; the poems bear the same titles as Wegrzynowski's paintings.

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AD INFINITUM!

New and Selected Poems

1995—2025

New Poems

Ad Infinitum!

Jesus wept. And then Martha wept. And then Mary wept. And then Peter wept. And then the house cat wept. And then a lion wept. And then the wolf wept. And then Wolf Blitzer wept. And then Henry Kissinger wept. And then Kurt Cobain wept. And then Joan of Arc wept. And then Howdy Doody wept. And then Walt Whitman wept. And then Walt Disney wept. And then Chinggis Khan wept. And then Dr. Spock wept. And then Bruce Lee wept. And then the mothers and fathers wept. And then The Mamas & the Papas wept. And then Cleopatra wept. And then Adolf Hitler wept. And then Reese Witherspoon wept. And then Chuck Wepner wept. And then Basho wept. And then the crickets wept. And then Buddy Holly wept. And then Mina Loy wept. And then Myrna Loy wept. And then Julius Caesar wept. And then the Caesar salad wept. And then the pencils wept. And then the erasers wept. And then the objet d'art wept. And then Art Carney wept. And then Queen Mary of Denmark wept. And then the pyramids wept. And then the hieroglyphics wept. And then the Alamo wept. And then the pope wept. And then Anton LaVey wept. And then Lazarus came back to life! And then Lazarus started weeping and said to Jesus, "Stop crying, Jesus!" "You, stop crying!" Jesus said. "You stop crying, Bro!" Lazarus said to Jesus. And Jesus said to Lazarus, "You stop crying, Dude."

Ornamental Trees

I miss the trees of my youth. Especially,
the one named Pete. I remember my first pair
of glasses. How, when I put them on, I could see

each of Pete's individual leaves. It was autumn,
and the land was covered with frost, and I saw
in my breath each individual droplet of moisture,

and I said the words, "Hey, Pete," and Pete said,
"Nice glasses, Joe." Pete's limbs were strong
and could hold my weight when I climbed him

and when I swung from the rope swing. I was
a dashing hero. I rescued the squirrels and kittens
from impending danger. Now, many years and many

miles away, I live with trees named Coco
and Xerxes and Ichabod. A dogwood with its pale
blooms and martyr complex. Eastern redbuds

with their weak limbs and leaves thinner than paper.
Not like old Pete, the live oak. When Pete
finally fell, there were so many roots dislodged

you could smell the dirt. Poor Pete, who fell
on my childhood home and killed my parents
and my siblings Paul, Tom, and Christine.

His Monster Songs

They find the family murdered by a monster. The neighbors accuse the guy next door: he drinks a lot; he sometimes swings from a hammock on his sleeping porch; he was heard howling when he stubbed a toe.

But the neighbors have no real proof. It's obvious the family was killed by 8-inch claws and very long fangs.

The guy next door begins to obsess about the story of the monster. He writes songs about the monster and the dead family. At neighborhood gatherings, he plays his shiny black accordion and sings his monster songs.

Finally, the neighbors have him jailed and executed.

Then a monster kills and eats family #2.

Innis the Invisible

I was in the barn when my sister,
Victoria, called to me:
“What are you doing in there?”
“I’m talking to Innis,” I said.
She opened the barn door and came in
and stood next to the feed sacks. “What?
Who’s Innis?” she said. “There’s no one here.”
“There he is,” I said. “Can’t you
see him stacking hay?” “Stop
screwing around,” she said. “We need
to get going or we won’t make it
to church on time.” “Innis is miffed
that you’re saying he doesn’t exist,”
I said. “Whatever,” she said and stomped
out of the barn. The donkey brayed
and the rooster crowed loudly.
“I wonder what got into her,”
I said to Innis, but he was
nowhere to be found, which
was a little scary because
Innis was a murderer.
I finished up my chores and hoped
that Innis hadn’t followed
Victoria to the house.
And then I halfway hoped he did.

How I Met My Future Long-Lost Love

I wanted to dig a well in my back yard.
My friend said, “You should get one of those
well witchers to come by.” “Where on earth
would I find one of those?” I said. “I know
a guy,” he said. “Okay,” I said. The well
witcher’s name was Toby. “It’s an awfully small
yard,” Toby said. “I don’t know if this is going
to work,” he said. I nodded, disappointed,
but Toby pulled out a stick with two prongs,
and immediately the stick led him
to a nice spot in the shade. “This is it,”
he said. I got out the shovel and dug
for a little while to mark the spot.
All of a sudden, a colony of ants
started gushing out of the ground
followed by some ferocious woodchucks
clicking their teeth at us. “Whoa!” I said,
and we stepped back. Then several deer sprang out,
followed by 11 or 12 emus.
The yard was now lousy with critters
running around, stomping, biting, and kicking.
Then out popped the most beautiful person
I’d ever seen. She had troubled eyes.
I could tell she was going to break
my heart. “That’s enough!” I said and started
shoveling dirt back into the hole.

The Pallbearers

he had asked to be cremated
and that his remains be strewn

in the winds over Lake Cahuilla
but his son ignored all that

and had him dressed in a shark blue
suit and placed in a sleek casket

with handles inset in the wooden sides
so that the contraption nearly broke

our wrists as we carried him
from the hearse to the grass

the service was perfect
like something from a movie

except the place was lousy
with squirrels and honking geese

and we tripped over footstones
and flower arrangements just to get him

to his spot in the crowded lot
the eulogist eulogized for over

an hour and the old women were flagging
and the old men leaned against

tombstones and I getting old myself
felt the skin on my bald head

as it baked in the June sun
in less than a week's time

the skin on my silly pate
would flake and fall like ash

My Report on the Apple Pie

The apple pie lives
in the woods next to the park.

At night, it rides the merry-
go-round. It eats from the orchards

of Eastern Washington
and drinks from the Okanogan

and Yakima rivers.
The apple pie's favorite

song is Yankee Doodle.
In the story of the garden of Eden,

the apple stands for truth;
the apple pie stands

for fun. Each apple pie
contains three tons of sugar

to counteract with the bitter
fruit tase. Apple pies mate

for life. They have been known
to count the number of children.

The apple pie is the only natural
predator of the American citizenry.

The Secret Mission

My wife went out of town to visit her brother, so I went to the grocery store to look for things that were normally verboten or scoffed at. First in the shopping cart: cheap beer. Second: canned sausages and plain old store-brand saltines. Next, I meandered to the dairy aisle and there it was: American cheese, glowing bright orange in the fluorescent lights. As I was reaching into the cooler, someone shouted, “George!” and I turned to see a beefy face smiling at me. “Salted, buttered, and grilled!” he yelled. I dropped the package and darted down a nearby aisle where I plowed into a middle-aged woman wearing a cheerleader outfit. “Sliced! White! Bread!” she shouted. I helped her up, abandoned my cart, ran past the greeting cards and magazines, and dodged through jeers and cheers of retired high school teachers and basketball coaches. “Milk-Protein Concentrate! Rah!” yelled my former guidance counsellor. Then a guy in an army uniform yelled, “Frankfort, KY!” I sprinted out the door toward my car, and a dark minivan screeched to a halt in front of me. Three huge lugs jumped out. One of them said, “Come with us. It’s time to return to the motherland.” “Yes,” I agreed. “It’s time.”

Michael's Birthday Party

It started out with Michael's mom talking about how difficult it had been. She had carried Michael in her body for nine months, and she hadn't been the same since. Then Michael's father piped in to talk about how he'd left his life as a musician and worked a dead-end job so he could put food on Michael's plate. Then Michael's friends talked about how he'd saved their lives. How he'd talked them down from bad decisions. Provided hope when there was no hope to be found. Dived into a burning building to save a labradoodle. Then we surrounded Michael and stabbed him with a cake cutter. Michael died on the same day he was born.

2 Epigrams

On Love

a knife
in the side
that keeps
you
alive

On Hope

I hope
when
the sky
falls
it falls
fast

Hidden Drive

I'd been driving through the woods. I'm not sure how long. It seemed like decades. I was starting to worry about my little dog, Tiny. Tiny was a big dog weighing 300 pounds. Tiny was looking pretty anxious. I was getting anxious, too. We hadn't eaten in days. We were searching for my friend Tad's house. We kept driving back and forth, up and down the road, passing a sign that said Hidden Drive. "Boy, they aren't kidding," I said to Tiny. Finally, exasperated, we got out of the car and started walking along the roadside. Then, near the sign, Tiny found a big hole in the ground. We climbed down into the hole. It was a dark cave. We groped along the walls and found a sconce with a torch in it. I removed Tiny's sweater and tore it into rags and wrapped it around the handle of the torch and lit it. On the walls and ceilings there were elaborate paintings of bison and strange creatures that looked vaguely human. Then I saw an old man huddled in a corner of the cave. He was dressed in bearskins, and he had a long beard. "You look hungry," he said. "I have some grilled mastodon. Wait here." In just a moment he returned with some hamburgers. Tiny and I scarfed down the burgers. "This tastes just like ground beef," I said. "It's mastodon, though," he said. The torch flickered. The man's eyes looked familiar. "Tad!" I said. "You idiot. What are you doing hiding away down here like a crazy person?" "You're the one hiding," he said. "Driving around for how many years? What about your family? Your responsibilities? All you care about is that stupid dog," he said. "But you're my best friend, Tad." I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes. "My name is Ted," he said. "And we're mortal enemies." "Fuck you, Tad," I said. "Yeah, that's about right," Ted said.

The Christmas Tree

We drove through the field toward a stand of pines.

In the distance, a church bell rang.

Pa stopped the truck, got out, and reached for the axe.

Ma got out her chainsaw.

I reached into my pocket for my trusty little knife.

The trees grew restless in the breeze.

And then they started to run.

Larry the Lucky, Larry the Brave

When I got off at the bus stop,
I didn't know where I was.
The streets were busy, and I weaved
in and out of the drunken crowd.
"Did all the bars close at once?"
I thought to myself.
Then a lady tackled me.
"Larry!" she said. "I'm not Larry,"
I said. "Ho! You're funny!" she said
and took my hand and dragged me
into an alley and down a flight of stairs
to this dive bar. We opened the door
and the place fell silent. All eyes
were on us. "Larry!" everyone yelled.
I thought it might be best
to play along. I waved. And then
a wave of men and women hopped up
to smile and slap me on the back
or poke me in the ribs. If I'd been
the real Larry, I probably
would've enjoyed all the fuss,
but I was overwhelmed
and a little annoyed. Then the real
Larry walked in the door. "Imposter!"
Larry's friends yelled at Larry. "Pervert!"
said the lady who'd tackled me.
I fought my way past the real Larry
and out into the street. Lightning
flashed and the rain was coming down
in torrents. I ducked into a pizza shop
and there was my friend Terrance
behind the counter. "Doug!" he yelled.
"What a surprise!" And I was surprised, too.

To find that I still felt
like this guy called Larry. “You look
awful,” Terrance said. “What’s wrong?”
I couldn’t explain. I missed Larry’s friends
and the lady who’d tackled me
and all the adventures
Larry would surely have. Larry
the Lucky. Larry the Brave.

How I Sleep at Night

I close
my eyes

and fold
myself

into a
question

mark

Big Sky Poem

One afternoon, I was waiting for my tea to steep, so I watched as Sarah opened up our mail. She opened the first envelope, unfolded a single sheet of paper, and looked puzzled. “What is it?” I asked. “This says we have to move to Montana,” she said. “What? Let me see that.” She handed me the letter. It appeared to be from the government. “Huh,” I said. Tears started to well up in Sarah’s eyes. “What about your dad?” she said. “Who will take care of him?” I examined the letter and the envelope it came in. “And my nieces and nephews,” she said. “I won’t get to see them grow up.” After reading the letter twice, I said, “It doesn’t look like we have any choice. It says we’re part of the witness protection program.” “But I haven’t witnessed anything,” she said. “Not ever.” “Me neither,” I said. She paused for a moment and said, “I don’t know anything about Montana.” “It’s called Big Sky Country,” I said. “It was the site of the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. Its major industries include timber, tourism, agriculture, and mining. All that being said, I think we need to invest in some bear spray,” I said. “What the hell? Are you some kind of Montana expert?” she said. “I just like to know things,” I said. Then Sarah began shoving me, quite forcefully. I didn’t know what was happening, but, finally, I found myself shoved out into the yard. Sarah went inside and locked the door behind her. Then I heard a lot of muffled bumps and groans. It sounded like she was barricading the door and putting together makeshift weapons. I sat on the steps and contemplated all that had happened. I looked up into the sky. I found several constellations. The Big Dipper. The Little Dipper. Ursa Major. Ursa Minor. I felt a sudden loneliness that I’d never felt before. “I need to buy bear spray,” I whispered to myself.

Mechanics of the Hearse

After the casket
is loaded

into the back
the driver

releases
the brake

the car lurches
forward

Feral Cat

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.
White snow.

Black cat.

from *Notes Toward an Apocryphal Text* and *Dead Letters*

Self-Portrait with Loaded Weapon

I sat in the chair. The chair sank
in the soft sod. Behind me stars
sank or slid off the edge of blue.
Down the hill, rabbits pranced
with little machete dreams. An
angry finch sang a dirge or led a
flock of finches in a dirge. The
laundry on the line: your white
flags. I opened a hole in my
throat. A song came forth.
Nonplussed you sat there in your
inky rags. You sipped your
coffee. Turn the page.

Landscape with Burning Accordion

Build a nest, Dear Elephant,
in the elephant graveyard.

Nestle amongst the tusks
impaling air.

*

Don your hat, virginal shepherd,
and grab your staff. The sheep
are off flocking with the goats.

*

Sir Wolf, you among us
have the grace to howl,

to amass weapons to sell
for drugs and the drugs to barter
with the burning accordion

*

each chuffed note
fanning the flame
that burns
the accordion.

Dear Sir—

I am like a fish,
black spot—
false eye—
near my dorsal fin.
Don’t know
which end
to bite
do Ye?

Gathering the Heroes

(1)

I slept soundly on the bed
of dirt and trash in the parking lot
next to the all-night dining car.

If not for the cars parked in neat rows,
the shards of glass might resemble
stars seen from a grassy knoll.

My Dallas, my W.C., I bled heroically
for you and the five and dime carousel.

(2)

That Chrysler K-car with the pool cube
in its exhaust, that was a keeper.
The kitten asleep on the dash had torn
the map to my dream-child, as if
there could be such a thing.

He carried coal-lung, he carried pocket
knives, he carried Johnny-In-A-Bottle.
He carried a small landmine, he carried
books and salt, he sang a little tune
about broken glass, books,
and salt. So much
for nostalgia.

(3)

I was driven in the open limousine.
I floated between the pages
of a book. I ate scrambled eggs
and toast in Dallas, in my W.C.
where the glass was keen
and so were the peaches. One bite
and they could kill you with their
sweetness and guffaws.

The General

1.

A brass band gathered outside my hut,
politicos with long plumes and matted hair.

The queen touched the blade against my cheek,
electing me general and judiciary.

2.

Then came the armadillos in the armored car.
By far their cigarillos burned brightest.

They placed the pearl studded pistol
on my thigh, next to cellular phone
and pocketed politicos.

3.

Orange bands ringed her arm.
She took dictation from the dictator.

The general hid his disdain
for the populous, their dyspeptic id.

4.

Locked boxes sought
to tear at my boots.

The bluesman accounted
for my bruised nukes.

The starlight did nothing
to cool me. I vetoed starlight.

5.

The irises and white roses
ringed my grave.

The inscription on my marker
encouraged the uprising.

Each individual crow returned
to its particular murder, my image
emblazoned on every breast.

Inconstancies

*

Each held their own internal each
Her own boisterous they wore
Their leather mouths the frenzied jar

*

The skirts like fields each word each body
She combed her pockets reached for drink

*

After crucifix release to assembly
Resemble torn handkerchief

*

The pastor called
In the voice of 3rd

The night
On palomino flocking/surround

*

The spirit transplanted into fern
To outlive that will outlive

*

When sit scholar of light principled
By beyond deserve never mind
Me molecule Chinggis Khan

*

Advisory committee brings
Librium robed
In gowns made of flax

*

The verse consumed behemoth
As tilted the metropolis

*

Replaced your obit with omelet
Combed voice to illicit
Rode your shoulders
To the mosque

*

The muse resembled grackle
Or dirty gumdrops falling
From dime machine

*

We peeked through window
To watch Swills Guard roll out
Hammers. Floyd thought of a flag,
Felt patriotic.

*

The buttons of his eyes
Were closed we followed
That cart like dogs

*

We rolled the Pope
Into cigar we passed
From saint to saint.

Such a gentle man,
such fine hair.

Your Eminence

Longing for a promised land,
the negated cross whispered.
The great book opened. Out fell
a leaf and then a bird and then
a flock of birds. The leaf
was red the color of wine.
The birds sang and then shot
off like missiles. Your Eminence,
the missive of the skull falling
like a pebble into the void.
Your Eminence, I wrote
this missive on aforementioned leaf—
it floats in the pond into which
the angels pee.

In Reverent Nocturne

we wore broken tongues,
we gazed at the hard bread of doubt.
We angered first a martyr's bones
and then his ghost. Under so long
a drought, we sprinkled blood
on the golden calf. From the Church
of Her Damask Dearest Fallen, a song
swelled with verses calling down saints.
We drank from the horn
of the birth/virgin, sang the song:
We Followed Here.

The Image of Christ

came to her in the form of a shaman who taught her to hang in midair, her arms outspread. The blood trickled down her side. *This is normal,* said the shaman now in the form of Benito Mussolini. The stigmata vanished. *Now you must learn perpetual death and resurrection,* he said. The clock ticked. Due to the exposed wires dripping from her side, she began to contemplate electricity. The shaman took the form of a noodle dish. All ponderance due to the image of Christ soon subsided, though off in the distance, one could hear a moan as a hammer hit a nail.

The New House

I.

I entered with my new deck of cheetahs
they ran amuck in the wedding cake
I waited for you with a glass of wine
until the wine ran out I waited
until my smokes were smoked
I oped a book and every last word

II.

After several days I began to relax
arranged the furniture drew on
the walls with my own blood
then I turned on the television
and there you were breaking bread
with the Dali Lama

III.

Or maybe it was a llama
a fish represents a lion represents
I represented as I accepted the award
I am represented by the law firm
Dewy Lyle Teatime represented
by this word and the next
tomorrow I will await
your usual show
on the television

IV.

My time in the house drew close
the end of my life drew nigh
I kissed the imaginary images
I placed my hand on the television
and awaited the cheetah You
running through my dreams
You run among palms
on a white beach
You wave at placid sea
endlessly reflecting

You Can Ruminate

over the days
of well witching birdsong
those peaches rotting
on the ground or you can face
your twilight all those stars
teasing the blue horizon
they say night is so much more
than we bargained for

The Savior Among Us

He threw bales of hay from the loft
to the lambs and set
the barn bleating
He climbed to the roof
a whooping crane
descended and spirited
Him away text messaging
columns of fire

Axe of the Apostles

We moved the head
of The Huge Overlord.
We split his sword in half.
We parted the Red Sea
for old time's sake.
In lieu of real apostles,
we used disciples
to guard the axe.
They splintered
the cross of Christ.
We wept the faith.
We remembered
Thousand. We wrapped
the splinters and sold them
as toothpicks.

Oh Rock to Which I Crawl

In the shadows a depth was attained the light comprehended not nor did said light concede to me I covered myself with dirt the glass jar on the hill swayed the planets swayed the injurious to persist as stars persist the splayed tether dangled from my neck as did my millstone: the parrot Absalom Absalom comprehended the stars he composed the song which I sing to you Oh Rock To Which I Crawl I have hidden my light within you I have painted on your surface my opus posthumous: “Self-Portrait with the parrot Absalom”

In Hide and Hair

I.

To deal with the shifting snow,
Mr. Peacock became a therapist.

His wrists clotted/clanked.
The skyscraper swayed.

He served his patrons valentines
cut in quarters, but his patrons preferred
the blind eyes of his beatific feathers.

II.

Between the cell phone
and the absence of the cell phone,
Lot's wife looked into the wind and became
the gust that carried cellular mercy.

III.

The stone lifted like a reed
and clipped Homer on the ear.

Its inscription slapped him blind.

He chiseled away at the stone.
Thus, he eroded the message.

IV.

Kindness brought out
the wolf in Anna.
Her raincoat hid her eyes
but not the hoary frost
in her beard.

V.

Shall I break my pitcher
so that the light of my torch
will blind my oppressors
at the roller rink?

VI.

If thinking nuclear thoughts,
the horizon should sprout
miniature madonnas.

VII.

The cicadas chirp
to the grass. The grass
never chirps, nor does
that piercing white eye,
star number 1,376.

Song for the French Girl

1

I know a girl who's French.
Her hair smells like night.

New as the dew,
lovely as rain,
she holds us all
in the strangest
of spells.

La, La, La.

(chorus: I. Hate. America.)

2

I know a girl who's French.
Her voice, a baby bird's,
makes us laugh.

She's eaten bread
from the bakeries
of Lyon;
there's nothing here
but dirt.

La, La, La.

(repeat chorus)

3

I know a girl
who's French,

shyer than the moon
on a rainy night,
subtle as a star.

Her mouth
is a chained door
through which

I can barely see
a splinter of light,
a sliver of a room.

La, La, La.

(repeat chorus)

Blue Clocks

Oh strange planets at play
in April beat to the time
of my aching head

*

Not in the solitary
obituaries of the day
born of hairshirts
and eclipses examine me
in my most comfortable
pose I wear the pointed hat
of the pope in his chair
oh the images
of corsets stropped
to the tongue

*

Not in a place
of ancient negations
one in a place
of purple townships
(truly these images
induce the funeral ship)
let us remove
the pointed hat
and sit down

Sadness in Spring

The little houses running around,
the cell phones flapping across the sky.
Our hero kicks our hero kicks
a can he kicks a can of paint
past flowers, pollen, chirping
dogs, he kicks a can of tar,
he kicks an imploding star.
Cars and cows are whipping past
his very large, his very hairy ears.

The Ideal Bird

Its blue-black feathers!
He amazed the forest dwellers

As we spied him through our opera.
Adeptly, he used a corkscrew,

A compass. We coaxed the bird
Into our arms and placed him

On a cushion high atop a bi-ped.
We scrutinized to his

Splayed talons and sang
Country songs that mimicked

His cry. I gave him saltines
(My fave) and a glass of the finest

Brandy. The fucker bit me. And that's
How he got his name:

Spirit Bird of Longing
(Or The Ideal Bird).

Reality Is the Horse You Rode in on: Poems for Adult Accompaniment

An inquisitive Aardvark
Approached my Aeroplane
and Asked, “Have you got
any Ants in there?”

An Archer Aimed
an Arrow
at the Apple on my head
and I said...

…Better a Bow
than a Blunderbuss.

Bleating Bedsheeps
make for poor sleep,
so I cover me sheeps
with a Blanket.

A Curious Coyote
ate some peyote
then danced
the tarantella
on a Catamount.

Carl grew tired
of the Cacophonous Codfish,
so he moved his bed
to a battleship.

The Devil
Drew Doodads
beginning
with the letter D.

A Decade in which
lazy Ducks fly Dirigibles.

The Emu
ate my English horn
which is Emblematic
of the actions
of the Emu.

Fifty Felines
circling my stilts.

Fred Found
his Fedora Floating
near the coast
of Florida.

The Guy playing
the Glockenspiel
Got angry
when I…

…Hid his tiny
Hammers.

Hello, I said
to the Heron
Hailing a cab.

Isabel illustrated
her Idea
for building
an Ice bridge
to Istanbul.

The June bug
danced a Jig
on the Jukebox.

Katie Kicked
the Kicking can,
just for Kicks.

The Leaping Lemurs
drove their Beemer
off to Lithuania.

Mannequins
Making Maps
to the Moon.

Niles Nickel-and-dimed
Nicole for her
Nanny goat.

The Narwhal
was careful and Never
did he Nick
my Nephew,
Nick.

The Opossum
ate my…

...Peaches
and Pelted me
with the Pitts.

The Phoenix
Phoned the doctor
about his enflamed
Pharynx.

The Quail
cooed
to the Quetzal.

Reality
is the horse
you rode
in on;

please dismount
and hop aboard
my Rickshaw.

Salacious Sirens
Sang to my Uncle Sal
last Saturday.

The Tyrannosaurus Rex
Took my Toy
Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Umberto
was Ubiquitous.

Upsy-daisy,
I said
as I hoisted
Up the daisy.

I Vaulted
with great Velocity
over the Venerable Bede.

The beached Whale
Wasted away
on his diet of Wheat germ.

Whimbrels like Whey,
Whereas my Walrus
likes Whipped cream.

The Xanthandrus
hitched a ride
on my Xebec.

The Yellow-
bellied sapsucker
Yelled
at my buddy,
Yeats.

The Zen master
played a Zither
at Zero hour.

from *More Unknowns*

Flowers

The petals tremble their bright blue
soothes the eye the crows bounce
in the grass like clowns or comedians
like babies or the bourgeoisie
first the planes overhead
then the sound of propellers
one imagines a lilting tree
ants crawling across the pages
of a book the single oak lets fall
its shade like a lake like dark waters
at night the gars are rising
brushing past us as we drown

God Is the Present Moment

She stared at the computer which
kept flowing and never flowed as
if to recline meant to fix to ossify
the child leaping to leap to turn
the constant glued to seam the
parenthetical to shatter to know
she prayed to the real she
combed her hair she felt the same
way again she wanted to walk
beside it she wanted the flag to
rise and to see the feathered wing
in fixed meditation she laid it
down on the rock just to know
the ancient without the usual the
statue on hinter hooves the
bearded man an arm outspread
one foot locked within the stirrup

The Museum Closes at Five

1:00

he made something/ he made summary
the Sumerian or ancient Babylonian
and he wore his tie with such a sumptuary neck
he drove his boozy car into the horizon
at 63 m.p.h.

2:00

we investigated the Precambrian
we broadcasted the voices of silly
poets into the stratosphere
we ate the bivalve
we sewed our seeds of preamble,
of predestination

3:00

the post was resumed
dearest Helga, with her middy blouse
and silver skirt
nothing left for the taleteller
to sell but the truth
to leave the slow-witted
in their rowboat

4:00

the bright blips the zeros and ones
the repurchase agreement with which
we punctuate our middle years
all that is said into the darkening field

5:00

red flannel across the table
she swerved the woolen scarf
trimmed the Middle America
leashed the lecherous husband
painted the buttercup

Aglaope

that evening
you wore a black dress
in your hands
you carried a dagger
my heart has a name
it was on the dagger
I lifted a car
I pulled a train
by its cowcatcher
O Sea, when I met you
I sank like a stone

Biography of Don Knotts

I inhaled deeply the rust colored valley in winter the coyote and deer quivering in the pink hue I held my key ring, the moon, in the low clouds my head contained two, no, three wars the field rose to swallow the clouded stars I was waiting for the third eye to open

Little Waves

what I said was a lie
the dragonflies were

the edge was never mind
the dory let it sink

its little lie and sleep
below the surface

after a series the houses
above stare out at buoys

go ahead deny
a boat can sing

nothing happens
beneath waves

Afterlife

I float

drift

suddenly am dirty river

all dispersing speck

silly little pony

that drinks from dark eye

Composition with Orange

my refereed lowbrow blown fault of the pope gone into the nosebleeds the industrial military complex of my tulip bed assassination by cricket the heat-guided occult boozy fans of the garish team colors hooded detainees buying concessions I wear the one-color jumpsuit I hammer at the chain of my convictions I carry the flit gun in its sheath, wind to my back

Happy and Sad

so it goes: the red within the head the threat level building like days the child shoulders her toy rifle they have it wrong on the roof what else is old? the scarecrow in the window the fir engine that fabricates firs so I wear a billion tankboots so I pierce the sky with flames time to lie down in the dust the robin swoops down like a hawk

Biography of the Crow

he hails a taxi
shakes his AK-47
at the sun
and whistles
through the bullet holes
in his beak

Poem

This early part the dream birth of the foal startles

you rise from green lake onto dock, onto bridge

into moths and headlights the shadows of deer

silhouettes of abused children stepping

through long grasses

More Unknowns

reloaded assault rifle and shouldered it flanked by gray toddlers with Uzis and flak jackets I flagged the passers by the driver of the utility truck opened the door *some day the baby lambs will have peas some day we'll piece together the True Horse* on the radio/on the ledger the monk in color guard nobody using the full stop as I strive for the pinch to be guarded to be gone

Inaugural Poem

he climbed the stars triumphantly
he punched a collage and sat on the blood red book
he re-upped his commitment and sang the beginning of a
show tune
by noon he'd drunk his weight in Long Island
after the royal patrons had parted
he, bedecked in an hourglass tie,
led by waving a baton
leading the eunuchs in their racket
cleaning and reloading their ancestral muskets

Benjamin Franklin

her feet were like flames
she raised her paw and the scroll fell open
the decree was decried
the law was soon put into action
Mr. Franklin did a cartwheel
and looked out across the lively Huns

from *Derelict Days in That Derelict Town: New and Uncollected Poems*

A Walk in the Park

you giddy walking through the park
sleepy daydreams as usual
you imagine a great battle you kick
you punch you gouge with your fingers
like a snake striking a strike snaking its way
around an impenetrable shield
you lock the joint you plant your feet
you pin the enemy against a tree
you tree a sure-footed matador
he drops his sword you tree the bull too
your tired sweeps now sweep at nothing
at ghosts in the grass they are specters
slapping you silly you sweat
a migraine develops you feel
a crook around your neck
you limp hobbled by it all
floaters in your fingered eyes
thumbprints on a ruined day
now the clubs are out
and they're clubbing away
a dense fog there in the leaves
you see a worn and weathered crutch
abandoned on the ground
I too little crutch am lonely
where is the lovely child
running through the forest where is he
who is miraculously healed?

Dandelion Blues

Oh, seeds of dandelions fallen
on the ground, I wish I could love you more.

Remember that day when the trucks careened
through the neighborhood, when the sea-green

SUV sang like a top? No,
when the sea sang down at the wharf

and the ice cream truck stopped
in front of my little house,

and some kid in a baseball cap
was chopping at the honeysuckle

growing along the fence line? Its scent
was choking him. In three years'

time, he would be crushed
by a backhoe. What can I do for you,

silly landscape? That strange old Victorian
with a thousand gables. The county clerk

in the park, flying her kite. She runs
and runs. But what has happened to the wind?

Not enough to kick up the dust
of the baseball diamond. A comet flings

itself across the dusky sky. Cars
roll by, their windows at half-mast.

O Derelict Days in That Derelict Town

Sleepy town square w/ statue of yet another
silly founding father: I'm smoking

with the boys outside the pool hall. Who
am I kidding? I'm all alone, watching

the deer lick the shop windows. The glassy-eyed
hunters sigh heavily in their air-conditioned cars.

The pigeons pick daintily at the sidewalk.
They're not from around here. Brightly colored,

bookish, with eager little eyes. The boy
on the ladder tinkers with the town clock. His bicycle

is chained to one of the three streetlamps. The kids
from the private school tumble out of the school bus.

They look like gumballs. Today, it rained, and steam
rose from the hot asphalt and then vanished

like hope. Lightning flashed, though far away
in a field where a farmer mowed down delinquent

cotton plants. Dusty little store selling
hard candy, over-ripe fruit, peanuts,

and glamour magazines. I think I'll catch
a movie. One where everyone looks

like they're in a war, but, really, they're falling
in love. The squirrel comes by like clockwork.

I've fallen asleep on the park bench. "You
don't belong here," he says. Yes, I know,

Mr. Squirrel, I know. The sheriff is drunk again.
He teeters like a bowling pin. The postmaster

is locking up the post office. He's madly
waving his arms. The stamps have escaped

their cubby holes and are flying around
behind the glass doors and barred windows.

The Artist at Work

The morning ended as usual.
I painted with the color chartreuse.

I made a sandwich out of fire
and ate it as I was driving

around the room in an ancient golf cart.
My understudy, a retired

vice admiral, stared at me
as if I were an assassin

suddenly arriving
with a whole platoon of sea monsters.

I stayed in the golf cart. I ate
my goddam sandwich made of flames.

Everyday Monster

The steel machete in your paw,
deer running scared across the lawn,
across the park toward that magenta

horizon. Couples dance to a love song
from some other era. I suggest
you lay low, play it cool. In each toy house

hangs a loaded AR-15. For each street
on this grid, some minor disaster awaits.
Some might mistake you for a hoax.

Others might want to dress you in a bow tie.
I see you, lank and lonely. My ears prick
and swivel. My whiskers twitch. The family

has bedded down in an abandoned car.
No one fears the new war, though some kid
slips out into the night to hang a black flag.

There are rodents to fill the belly.
Little clumps of trees off the interstate.
A small creek for water. Little pools

of bright sky where you can gaze
into the eyes, a little too lost, a little
too lethal, for such a fine beast.

To Be That Boy, to Be That Horse

I've watched a shy horse
stand quietly and stare
into the woods at branches

trembling in the thicket. I've felt
the horse muscling under me
as it galloped and tried to buck,

as it calmly carried me
through the pasture. Once,
when I was a child, a teacher

told me about his father's
horse, a horse so gentle
that when the loose saddle

shifted and my teacher,
then a small boy,
fell to the ground, the horse

stood still, its hind leg
in the air, as if the horse
was pondering where to put

its heavy hoof. I wanted
to be that boy. I wanted
to be that horse.

Empty Chair, Empty Desk

Bob had a way of singing
with his eyes. His silly grin.
His shiny shoes. Bob
gave me scuba fins
for my trip to Waterloo. Ha!
He kept his horse behind
the water cooler. Bob's drone
was the best drone. Mike,
Bob's nemesis, would drone
on and on about
the paper weights. The paper
clip. The paper cuts
both ways. I would
like to say Bob died
in some disaster. Or fighting
with a rodent. Defective snow
shoes. Defective snow
globe. Bob's wife looks
as though she's lost her keys.
I've lost my patience with Mike
a thousand times. The other day,
I found Bob's horse
behind the copy machine.
I said, "There. There," and took
him home for the finest hay.

Strathmartine

I was running late for my meeting
with the town mob. I could track them,
though, by the smoke from their torches
and the sounds of loud cursing.
I found them in the parking lot
of an abandoned shopping mall.
They had surrounded a cement statue
of the town dragon and were hitting it
with tennis rackets, canoe oars,
and tire irons. “Martin!” yelled my friend
Jamie. “Get in here!” I was reluctant.
I didn’t see the point of abusing
a concrete dragon. Suddenly,
the dragon came to life and started
defending itself against the mob.
“It killed a bunch of wolves!” Jamie
yelled. “But we kill and eat wolves
everyday!” I said. Then the dragon
lunged at me and I grabbed
the nearest thing I could find:
a pole vaulter’s pole. I shoved it
into the dragon’s mouth, nearly
impaling the beast. It let out a blood-
curdling shriek and flew away.
From that day forward, I was known
as the town idiot.

A Pack of Wolves

When I noticed the wolves circling me,
their bright eyes fixed, their fur
all black and brown and gray

as they bared their white teeth in the white snow,
I felt a sense of wonder that I hadn't
felt in a long time, as if

anything were possible
there in the woods far from home.
"Hey, did you see that wounded antelope

back there fifty yards or so?" I asked
the wolves. Obviously, they weren't
buying it. So, I said, "Such nice doggies.

Do you want me to help you find
your way home?" The alpha, thoughtful,
skulked closer to me. "Home?" he asked.

"You know, a warm, cozy place
with bright lights?" "Yes, take us there!"
said one beta. "Yes, yes!" they all

agreed. "Come along," I said, and they
followed, trotting behind me.
Silly man, I said to myself,

What have you gotten yourself into
now? I led them to the town square
and we snuggled together for warmth

next to the door of the Five and Dime.
“Good night, pack,” I chuffed as I licked
my paws then closed my yellow eyes.

The Holiday Party

I didn't want my uncle Roy
to attend the office holiday party
but there was no other choice. Roy
was in town for a visit. Pulled up
in his sports car and honked the horn.
Honked like a Christmas goose.
Honked like a circus clown. Honked
like Harpo Marx. Well, you get the picture.
That tincture of bright tinsel on the tree!
Ah, the holiday party! Everyone
was shit-faced and Roy was swaying
like a skyscraper (he was about eight
feet tall) and holding forth about my
straight C's in middle school. Actually,
at this point, he was holding a fifth
of bourbon and talking about his son,
the lawyer, who built an Aeolian lyre.
Roy was fibbing. My boss eyed Roy
with annoyance. I thought there was
going to be a fight. I was getting
queasy. I'd had too much of the gin
and holiday cookies. I excused
myself and stumbled down the stairs
to find an empty bathroom. I washed
my face and felt a little bottle.
I mean better. I mean Beefeater
roiling in my stomach. And then
I saw, across the hall through the glass
walls, another holiday party.
But this one was quiet. It was a bunch
of mimes. A man opened the door
with a flourish inviting me inside
a large invisible box. It might

have been a normal box but I think
it was a phonebooth. “I haven’t seen
one of these in years,” I started
to say, but a lovely mime covered
my mouth with her hand. I was handed
a drink. I think it was a drink.
It might have been an umbrella.
It started to rain. Really rain.
Cats and dogs. And sheep. And shepherds.
And then the baby Jesus. And Santa
and his sleigh. And then a flurry
of reindeer coming down in a rush.
We were nearly crushed.

The Gift or the Jade Rabbit

If I'd known

I'd be trapped

in this cold

dark crater

for eternity

I wouldn't

have thrown

myself into

the flames

Winter Poem

I moved the limp body
out of the road

to the frozen grass
felt the broken spine

of the stray who ate
our table scraps

I was a child
but still I knew

there was nothing
we could do

animals pass away
or go on moving

toward some new danger
I pet the orange cat

next to me now
one of many

here and gone
but all are the one

dark creature
I lay next to

dark body I left
mewing in the cold

Bon Voyage

At this very moment, little black shoes
are walking out of the river onto shore.

So I climb the barge's ladder to the deck
and lay on the starboard planks and feel

at peace with the flagrant sun. I dream
of a dead friend's garden. First,

the box of matches, then the fire rising
like a bright hydrangea in the yard.

White sparks blooming on the edges
next to the Chinese tallow. I would like

to stay here longer. I drag the barge
through the field and leave it next

to the dilapidated barn. The cows
tap, gleefully, their leathery hooves.

I walk to Little Rock, Arkansas.
Buy a hotdog with mustard, with relish,

with aplomb. In one narrow alleyway,
two teachers are sawing a little girl in half

so they can put her back together again.
I stare in dismay. Such a long journey

to the littered courtyard outside the schoolhouse.
The bells toll. Is this the end of it all?

Light falling through the wrought iron fleur-de-lis
onto my dirty shoes. The wooden bench.

The crumbling gray and brown façade
of the emptied evangelical church.

O, Forefather

Not much has changed. The horses chomp
at the sage grass. The cowslips
pop up by the river. The speed at which

we travel matters little.
People are walking shoeless
through the ruins of houses in a valley

nearby, and the muffled noise
of talk, talk, talk. The trees are sick
and some are dreaming of suicide.

The space between us grows, and tiny
tyrants are everywhere.
They hide in the cornflakes, for instance.

I trust no one but the horses who play
in the field near your homestead.
The horses who chuff and snort.

Their hooves tap the code that I scrawl
on the red barn against a red horizon.
And, o yes, there are vultures

pecking in the high weeds near the lake.
I've heard you walked a million miles
to meet our foremother.

Lacuna

eyes cool
and fathomed
like the leaves

on the canyon floor
o to be
that bright blue

dismalite
in her
calloused hand

Achilles

My long, gray Cadillac sits,
not idling, not waiting to charge

down the dusty roads to make
some deal, some death, some grand

entrance. My friend is dead. He cools
his heels in hell. We used to raise hell,

the dust we left behind enough
to make another earth. In my dreams,

dark and shining horses drag us
through the fields. I wake to the car

radio. It croons, *I'll love you*
till I die. Dead fireflies

on the windshield aglow. His hand
turned the wheel. Now the Cadillac

sits brooding, silent as blood.
I die, consumed by fireflies,

not stars, while grander schemes
kill, fall, and fail to rust.

Rural Epigrams

Nocturne

Lone
baritone

in a choir
of crickets:

the bullfrog

Eclipse

Moon-
teethed

shadows
at her feet

the cicada
cries out

Tomato

Drunkard's
nose

bud
of a rose

so ripe
I pick your twin

and you fall
to the ground

County Dump

above
the waves of trash
the gull flies high
final page
of a manuscript

Ambiguous Night

A cat sits
in the road

spine stiff
yellow eyes

no it’s a fox
trotting away

its tail
a giddy cortege

Buck

The buck
lifts its

hooves out
of the snow

leaves strands
of fur

bristling
gray and white

on the
barbed wire

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